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FIFTY-ONE POEMS

By the same author

PRECIOUS BANE

GONE TO EARTH

THE GOLDEN ARROW

THE HOUSE IN DORMER FOREST

SEVEN FOR A SECRET

POEMS AND THE SPRING OF JOY

ARMOUR WHEREIN HE TRUSTED

Mary Webb
FIFTY-ONE POEMS

Hitherto unpublished in Book Form



with Wood Engravings by
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JONATHAN CAPE
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

These poems are a discovery. It was believed that the collection of Mary Webb's poetry published in 1928 and reprinted so many times since was all there was save some fragments which had not been finished and which were for that reason never published. The late H. B. L. Webb had selected and put on one side this little cache of verses for publication at some later date, and only recently were they found among his papers. They are published exactly as they were found and in the order in which he had arranged them. The last ten poems in this volume were included by H. B. L. Webb in the Mary Webb Anthology published in 1939.

In the introduction he wrote for the volume, *Poems and the Spring of Joy* by Mary Webb, Walter de la Mare says: 'Mary Webb had in her service rarely delicate senses. All poets are for their own purposes good "observers" but by no means all poets are very exact and comprehensive observers. Mary Webb, whose world was "a place of almost unbearable wonder", had senses almost microscopic in their delicacy. But any writing *about* poetry, however well-intended it may be, cannot but resemble beating the air. It can do little but attempt to give reasons for a delight that needs none. And Mary Webb's poems are more than usually her very self's.'



MASTER OF THE COPPICE

Travellers paused in the muddy lane to hear
The thrush that sang so late –
Alone in the clear dusk, with a voice as clear –
To himself and the moon and his mate:

A tawny bird flies under the thicket of sky,
Of sky as green as a seeded elm in spring –
A seeded, seeded tree!
She shakes out stars like dew as she passes by
Beneath the secret boughs with her secret wing,
Like my mate, my mate and me!
The thicket of sky grows dark as an elm in June,
June, June!
The star-dew thickens; that tawny bird, the moon
In the west has nested:
And deep in the seeded elm will be nesting soon
My mate – the ermine-breasted,
The tawny!

THE YELLOW-HAMMER

When Butter-and-Eggs in blossom was,
And the hour noon by the Shepherd's Glass,
The Yellow-Hammer in the eglantine
Called his wife and his child to dine.
But his wife cried out. *'Not these! Not these!
I will not dine with the bumble-bees!'*
And his fledgling son, from the cornel spray,
Scoffed and scolded and flitted away.
So the Yellow-Hammer lifted high
His gay striped head to the gay blue sky,
And shouted to the fairies in the fairy ring
All day drowsily slumbering,

*'Pernickety they are! They like not these –
So run to the larder and bring, bring, bring,
A little bit of bread and no cheese!'*





THE BEAUTIFUL HOUSE

A large house, a fair house, fragrant, wide and high,
The lord of life has given us. Oh, hear the plovers cry!
Down upon the speedwell floor, beneath the speedwell sky
Come and see the multitude of living things go by.

Hung about with may-bloom, sweet and white to see;
Full of silver songs and little wings in every tree;
Crossed by beast and bird, discreet in merry company –
This is but His anchor-hold. What must His castle be?

THE MOUNTAIN TREE

Montgomery's hills are deeply brown,
In Merioneth the sun goes down,
And all along the Land of Lleyn
The spate of night flows darkly in.

Come away to the mountain tree!
Cinnabar-red with fruit is she.
We'll watch the stars, like silver bees,
Fly to their hive beyond the seas.



SPRING AND A DEAD LEAF

Down by the golden alyssum
Which gives to the old grey wall
Scent and the bees' unceasing hum,
In a murmurous madrigal,
The linnets flew close above my head,
Their little wings fanned my hair;
A starling whistled, with wings outspread;
A blue-tit sang in the pear;
And two sweet thrushes, gone mad with love,
Sang rival glees in the trees above;
(But the blackbird was wiser, he stayed alone
And mused of his love in an undertone.)
On the warm grey wall a weary bee
Drowsed for a moment. In still content
She and her shadow slept quietly.
A blossom fell: like a thought they went.
A brown leaf wandered desolately
Pursued by a breeze, alone,
With no fair comrades and no dear tree
And no green sap of its own.
But it stayed where a small neglected seed
Lay cold in the evening frost;
It covered the shivering germ in its need,
Else what had the summer lost?
The leaf lay still. It ceased in the earth.
All the garden is in its debt.
For where it lay was the wondrous birth
Of a plant of mignonette.

BOUNTY

The full woods overflow
 Among the meadow's gold!
A blue-bell wave has rolled,
 Where crowded cowslips grow.
The drifting hawthorn snow
 Brimms over hill and wold.
The full woods overflow
 Among the meadow's gold;
The ditches are aglow!
 The marshes cannot hold
Their kingcups manifold.
 Heav'n's beauty crowds below,
The full woods overflow!



THE DANCE

There's nothing still in the busy world.
Breezes ruffle the wings that are furled,
Seeds go dancing across the meadow,
The pine-tree plays with her dancing shadow,
And ever, beneath the rough elm bark,
The river of sap flows on in the dark.
Far in the mountain, under the sea,
Invisible atoms mysteriously
Move to the making of valley and dune,
Marching on to an unheard tune.
Like homing birds the red clouds fly
At dawn. Like water the stars flow by.
Delicate flowers, each on her stem,
Dance with the leaves surrounding them,
And every weed and shell of the ocean
Answers the tide with a rhythmic motion.





THE GREAT WIND

Like little showers of brown and golden leaves
When autumn gales along the meadows roll,
Now fall the doctrines that have clothed the soul.
Among some lingering few the Great Wind grieves,
Till the tree stands denuded utterly,
In stern and sorrowful simplicity.

And yet, those shriven branches in the night,
Against the sky, are shining silverly
With mystic fruit of stars that fill the tree
Where falling leaves have left a space for light.
So glows the soul through which the Truth can shine,
Its last leaf loosened by the Breath Divine.

TWO FAITHS

Above his low green lawn, in tented splendour,
A great tree spread its branches, manifold
With lucent leaves that quickened into gold
And quivered into whispers low and tender,
While silver-throated birds came all day long
And haunted it with ecstasies of song.

There dawned a day – the migrant birds were
calling –

When, gazing with a gladness ever new
To where it stood so stately on the blue,
Across the sky he saw it slowly falling.
He had forgotten, so it roofed him round,
That it was rooted in his neighbour's ground.

Forlorn the grass without its chequered shade;
Aloof and cold the spaces of the sky
Without its comfort; now all silently
The wind went flowing by – of old it stayed
And talked among the leaves; the birds took
wing,
They could not sit upon the ground and sing.

Along the dumb air wandered presently
A white-winged seed. With love and hope and
toil

He planted it in his own garden soil.
And though he will not see it bless the sky
With spreading arms, it is enough to-day
That two pale, tender leaves uncurl with May.

And even because it is so humbly low,
With fluttering flight the youngest thrush of spring
Can gain its top and sing there, triumphing,
Its earliest music – tentative and slow,
But so divine in pathos, so fresh-hearted
That he is glad the other birds departed.



NATURE'S DOGMATISTS

Above the ooze beside the stream,
With triple branches orderly,
The tall white plantain-candles gleam –
Each flame divided into three.
Amid the darkening storm they dream;
Unflickering shines each trinity.

The blood-red willow-herbs that start
In close-ranked soldier companies
From out the water, sway apart
And fling their ensigns to the skies.
There lies in each flower's open heart
The great white cross of sacrifice.

Between these preacher-plants one stood;
To Him Who formed them both she cried: –
'Oh! art Thou then a Threefold Good,
Or has the plantain-doctrine lied?
And didst Thou die upon this Rood?
Ah! let my doubts be satisfied.'

She ceased, and watched the great world roll
To the East; a wind came down the hill,
Among the aspen-leaves it stole,
And stirred her heart to tremblings chill,
And sighed: – 'Beyond all signs My Soul
Is throned: poor questioning child, be still.'

BEAUTY AND TERROR

In the pear-tree I have seen
Strength stand up beside the stem.
Where young blossoms lit the green,
Beauty hovered over them.
I heard, when fragrant breezes played,
Life sing louder than the bee;
And felt within the stealthy shade
Terror crouch beneath the tree.

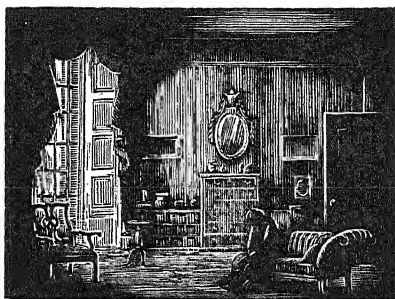
NIGHT IN THE OPEN AIR

Sleep fled from me – dear God, how could I sleep
With all Thy steadfast stars beholding me,
No shade between me and the dazzling deep,
Between my smallness and infinity?
Beneath our little sheltering roofs we creep
From this sharp terror of immensity,
This keen and restless joy; they guard and keep
Our weakness from the too much majesty.

How could we rest in earthly excellence,
Unsheltered from Thy shining purity?
Should we not quail before omnipotence,
And dissipate our souls in one long sigh
Of wonder? So Thou madest of pain and sin
A little homely thatch to roof us in.

A L D E R B U D S

On New Year's Day I set beside his bed
An alder branch, already bravely budded.
He smiled, but hardly cared to turn his head
And see how close the purple spheres were studded,
Wherein the April leaves lay slumbering.
He spoke of leaves that rustled by his pillows,
More golden-sweet than airs in summer willows.
I did not know he would not see the spring.



HEAVY SILENCE

Since he departed, Silence lays her finger
More heavily on this house than on his tomb.
For there with shining eyes his good deeds linger
And all their silver voices pierce the gloom.

DESOLATION

The solemn trees are motionless
Against a sadder sky
Than any I have known.
There falls no rain, no wind doth sigh;
There is a frozen misery
Too deep for tear or moan.

An agony of silence binds
All living with the dead;
And body masters soul.
Nor joy nor praise can lift its head.
Love seems a shell whence life has fled:
Man knows no hope – no goal.

There is no shadow, and no light.
The sky – one deathly grey –
Has drowned stars, moon and sun;
Unbeaconed, vast, it looms each way,
A sea where lost prayers go astray,
And none reach Harbour – none.

VIGIL

How fatherly the large return, how tender!
For that one night in which I watched by thee
To stoop so low from out thy new-found splendour
And watch, through all my nights of loss, with me.

J O Y

'The spring of joy! The spring of joy! I have not found it.'
So my soul questioned and complained each day.
I asked the singing thrushes where it lay;
They cried – 'We never built or sang around it.'
I questioned of a harper, passing by
To a festival;
He said – 'I know of no such spring at all.'
This my soul heard, and wept most bitterly.
We wandered hand in hand
By many towns and hamlets, weary-hearted:
For those we questioned could not understand,
Or else they smiled in silence, and departed.
But, when the sun
Had left us in the dusk, mysteriously
Came One,
Who stood and called my weeping soul, and she
Unclassed her hand from mine and ran from me
Like a blown leaf to shelter. Kneeling low –
'The spring of joy!' I heard her say;
'Oh, great Wayfarer of the world, you know –
Let me know too – the way.'
I did not hear their colloquy, for they
Were both withdrawn from me;
But when she came again, as one who brings
A treasure, she was carrying tenderly
Some little rosy things
Like seeds. 'We go to plant sweet love,' she said,
'In pain's deep forest.' Then she pointed where
The dark trees loomed. I cried – 'Oh, soul – not so!
No spring of joy is there.'

She answered – ‘None the less, at dawn we go.’
Like wraiths among the heavy shadows speeding,
Through trees as dark as night, as dumb as death,
We travelled, my soul leading.
Afraid at every breath,
When she stooped oftentimes to plant a seed,
I whispered – ‘Speed, oh speed!
This place is wild and evil, full of harm.’
And yet she trembled not, but, gravely calm,
She said – ‘There will be so much less to fear
For others, since the way that was so drear
Will be afire with flowers where we have been.’
But still she wept, and murmured wistfully –
‘I thought to-day that we should both have seen
The lovely spring of joy!’ Then carefully
She planted love’s last seed, and we passed on.
And there, at the edge of the forest, gleamed and shone
A little rocky, rose-encircled spring,
So fair, so fresh, its music made us sing.
And One
(Oh, marvel!) held a cup for us, and said –
‘I knew that dark way led
Straight here. Come, stand in the sun
And share with me.’
Then my soul knelt, and I,
Among the white and glistening flowers around it,
And drank the vital water with ecstasy –
So glad because through grief and love we found it,
The spring of joy!

SALLOW - CATKINS

Above a small blue sky of pond
The willow waves her catkins to and fro.
Round every golden ball there swings
A host of little flies with flaming wings –
Like planets round their travelling sun they go,
With all the limitless blue air beyond.

Above our sedgy destinies
The suns go down their circling, unknown way;
Like catkins on the osier tree,
Each with its worlds of fleet ephemerae,
In close-curbed liberty they sway
On the profound and limpid silences.

So – like the flies that burn and swing,
The suns, that fade like blossom on a tree;
Too small to offer praise, too great
For fear of the Unknown – let us create
The one thing we were meant to be,
And make our own appointed journeying.



HAZEL BUDS

Now breaks the sheath and spreads the leaf!
The bank beneath, the branch above,
Are set with nests, are homes of love.
So good-bye, grief!

With restful haste and gentle strife
Pink hazel stipules are unfurled,
Pink dawns are flung across the world.
So welcome, life!





ON THE HILLS

Buffet on sweet buffet, the wildwood came,
Like a green wave or a green flame,
With melodies
And delicate fragrances
And the secret souls of the watching trees.

Colour on grave colour sleeps the ancient moor,
With its blue roof and its purple floor –
Where small birds fly
With merry, pencilled eye,
And like great gods the stately clouds go by.

H A R V E S T S O N G

The noise of bells has sunk to rest;
The low grey clouds move softly on.
The land is still as Avalon,
Deep-breathing in its sleep, and blest.

For us the holy corn is spread
Across the quiet, misty dales
Towards the hyacinth hills of Wales,
To give our souls their daily bread.

For us that starling flock took wing,
And, like a silken banner blown,
Across the rippling corn has flown,
To teach our spirits how to sing.

A tiny hedge-bird chirps to me,
And down among the heart's-ease pass
The lowly people of the grass;
They preach to me of charity.



B U D S

Now, with a shout,
The companies of buds march out,
All in her livery dressed,
All with her life possessed,
All, in a chorus gay,
Singing her roundelay.



THE WOOD-WITCH

Dark on their slumbering steeps
The great woods rise;
Over their silent deeps loom the hot skies.
There, where the wood-dove sleeps,
Young Magic lies.

Misty her raiment is –
Hyacinth-fair,
Dim, twining witcheries thread her dark hair.
Who tastes her wild, sweet kiss?
Ah, few men dare.

Through her long, secret smile
All the strange earth
Creeps; in her elfin wiles mad hell has birth;
Heaven's self she beguiles
Into her mirth.

The bright day darkens she,
Spreading her hair;
And at night, sheenily, makes her limbs bare.
Who would her lover be,
Let him beware.

LILIES IN THE VALLEYS

'Gather me lilies in the darkling valleys,
Gather me lilies in the valleys of delight!'
'How can I gather lilies with no cloak to cover me,
And no shoes for stony ways, and it the dark night?'
'I will give you shoes of silver and a cloak for rainy weather,
I will set you in a love that laughs and a love that grieves;
I'll hold you and I'll fold you and we'll travel down together
Where the lilies shine like seed-pearls in the wet, dark leaves.
And we'll gather the brittle lilies in the flowery valley,
We'll bind them into sheaves in the valley of delight,
And up from mossy mountains shall spring the liliated morning
Like our love from the valley – from the valley of the night.'



REFLECTIONS

No beauty is mine, and yet I saw to-day
A lovely face within my mirror glassed;
For you had looked upon me as you passed,
And still there lingered, as you went away,
Reflections of your grace in mouth and eye –
Like those rare dawns that paint the eastern sky
And mirror forth
Their beauty even in the hueless north.

SUMMER REMEMBERED

Out on the wild and chill
Juniper-tangled hill,
By misty day and star-concealing night,
I hear your voice along the lonely height,
Making a haven for my heart that grieves,
Creating joy like birds among the leaves.

Far, far away the silver whimbrel spoke
In plaintive, startled cadence from the cloud,
As though she spied Love in his purple cloak,
As though she knew his lips so ripe –
Scarlet as cranberries –
And dared not call too loud
Lest she should hush that melody of his,
Lest he should fling away his oaten pipe.

There, where the sleek foals rest;
There, where the bracken burns toward the west;
Where springs are white and clear,
You brought me on a summer day, my dear,
Far, far away it seems and long ago;
Since then the winds have risen, since then has come the snow.

All colours mingled in transparent light,
Pierced by the hovering whimbrel's silver cry;
All things that once were dim
Thought upon Love's clear radiance and grew bright;
All flowers I once deemed scentless, dry,
Were filled with fragrance to the brim;
And from the blue, profound

Distance of summer, heaven gathered round,
Distilling as a dew, pressing so close,
We seemed all golden-dusted, like a bee
Drenched with the pollen of the wild white rose.
Then, in the hush of heaven, you spoke to me.

With heavy weights of snow the juniper
Breaks, and the wind howls in the frozen bough.
But I abide in a calm where no winds stir;
Where no flower falls and never song is broken,
Hearing the golden words that once were spoken
And so are spoken now.



T O - D A Y

Beyond the darkling sea if no fair shore
Lies, where low flutes play, where the bitter surf
Is all forgotten, and the deep sea roar;
Behind the towering, granite hill of death
If no green crown of smooth, untrodden turf
Welcomes us where the long-lashed daisies eye
The sun so ardently they cannot die,
And the wind sleeps beneath the orchard breath:

Then not for us the fugitive and fond
Dream of a following music, harmonies
Made from the human discord; for beyond
Is mist, and a voice crying – *All is over!*
Here is our heaven, in one another's eyes,
In children's silver laughter. Here and now
Ripe scarlet apples bend the golden bough,
The bees' low roar is in the purple clover.

THE BEACON

A robin's burning breast,
Where restless shadows of the pine-tree lie,
Shines through the driving snow
When lost winds cry.

Your love, with rosy glow,
When winds of fate and evil shadows roam,
Promises joy and rest
And brings me home.

ISOLDE

Safe in his arms, one moment I abide
Above the sinister waves. For him, for me
Dawns a brief peace, a fleet eternity.
Our silence drowns the full and threatening tide,
And we forget how many loves have died,
How stealthy comes the dark and ebbing sea,
When one, arms empty, calls on vacancy
And hears the echoes mock on every side.

How brief is our warm joy, how soon to end!
Let us hold close and spend our interval
In heaven! But busy stranger, eager friend
Break in, and – never knowing – steal our all.
Then, even as a cynic fate denies
Our love, the bitter surf is in our eyes.

APPLE - BLOW

The apple-blow that was so sweet,
So pink and clear,
Has flung its petals at my feet,
My dear – my dear!

The petalled joys that made my crown
When you were here,
Like heavy tears are fallen down,
My dear – my dear!



A B S E N C E

Beloved, I walk on the clear, bright grass.
Multiple-tinted, magical, still
Is the plain, where the blue cloud shadows pass,
The silver tree, the forget-me-not hill.

Gossamer-green are the pastures; there
The sheep cry loud and the sheep cry low.
Sounds of haymaking fill the air,
Fugitive voices come and go.

Surely this is the land of rest,
Safe at the hithermost end of sleep,
Where loud winds slumber and troubles cease,
Where no hands tremble and no eyes weep.

The clamour of rooks, with a peaceful sound,
Comes from the woodland far away,
Possessing the plain, from bound to bound,
With the dreamy life of a summer day.

I only am sad, my dear, my dear!
Though the delicate aspen shakes like a chime,
And the low hills, greener than glass, and clear,
Lead to the summits that fairies climb.

I care not for day, while linnet and swallow,
That have no sorrow, possess the sky;
I care not for night, when the dark blue hollow
Is full of stars for the white owl's eye.

Sad is the rose-red flower of the dawn,
And the smell of the hay in the tender dew;
I hear no sheep, nor birds on the lawn,
Because of my own voice calling you.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Now comes with silent feet
The white, mysterious New Year,
Through the dark windless morning cold and sweet,
Like a close-budded snowdrop, set between
Leaves sharp and faintly green
And upright as a spear.

I have no gift for you.
I could not find one worthy of your love –
Your patient love, that glows and blossoms through
The years, and makes a life once cold and grey
Like a rose on a summer day,
A wood blessed by one dove.

But though I have no gift,
I lean across your pillow all night long
To see you, when, through the first cloudy rift,
The light comes fair and new.
For, oh! I love you more than mothers do,
And should if all your gleaming right were wrong.

AUTUMN, 1914

*The scarlet-jewelled ashtree sighed – ‘He cometh,
For whom no wine is poured and no bee hummeth.’*

The huddled bean-sheaves under the moon,
Like black tents, will be vanished soon.
So fast the days draw in and are over,
So early the bees are gone from the clover –
To-day, to-morrow –
And nights are dark, and as cold as sorrow.

He’s gone, her man, so good with his hands
In the harvest field and the lambing shed.
Straight ran his share in the deep ploughlands –
And now he marches among the dead.

*The ash let fall her gems, and moaned – ‘He cometh,
And no bee hummeth.’*

‘O children, come in from your soldier-play
In the black bean tents! The night is falling;
Owls with their shuddering cry are calling;
A dog howls, lonely, far away.’

His son comes in like a ghost through the door.
He’ll be ready, maybe, for the next big war.

O world, come in from the leasowes grey
And cold, where swaths of men are lying,
And horror to shuddering horror crying!
Come home
To the wisdom of those that till the loam,
And give man time for his working-day!

*Then the white-blossomed ash will sing – ‘He cometh,
For whom the loving-cup is poured, the wild bee hummeth.’*

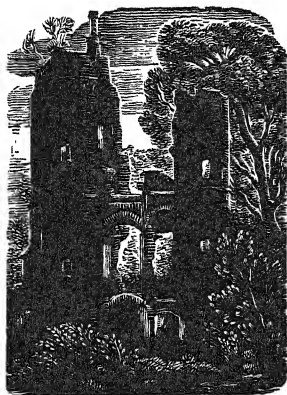


A LOVER OF ROSES

Here lies a lover of roses. All her years
She fashioned shrouds in a cellar underground.
At last she owns a rose-tree; all around
Where she reposes fragrant petals fall,
Clear pink and shelly and ethereal,
Raining upon the daisied grass like tears –
Only she does not know and cannot see:
Darker than any cellar lieth she.

NIGHT

The last red dormer fails, and darkness keeps
The village while it sleeps.
The young wife, and the widow in her sorrow,
The seven young children at the smithy,
The cygnets in their bower of withy,
The butcher, and the beast that dies to-morrow,
The snipe in fields of rush and mallow,
The dreamless dead within God's fallow –
All, all are still, while, from the pear-tree tall,
Like tears the quiet petals fall.
Along the street a stealthy horseman rides;
But when he speaks, none stirs nor hears.
 'Ye are but fallen leaves upon the tides!
I am the future, mine are all the years,
I know the things to be accomplished soon.'
None hears him; wrapped in slumber fast,
They dream upon the past,
While down the mossy roof-tree drops the moon.



FOREBODING

Scents of hay and roses thread the sunlight,
Blackbirds in the shade discourse together,
Earth is like a palace built for banquets,
Swallows anchor in unruffled ether.
Then my heart, whence comes this dreary wailing
Haunting all the arches of your hall,
Shrieking wilder than the wildest weather,
Colder than a winter funeral?

As the wind, within a ruined castle,
Prowls amid the once-delightful bowers,
Shouting round the now defenceless hearth-place
In derision of this race of ours,
So this cry comes echoing through my spirit
Like a witch's shriek. Ah, whence and why
Does it rend the blue and golden silence?
Gaunt Foreboding answers – 'It is I.'

S U N S E T

Dull is the sun as an old lanthorn guttering,
And wild the valleys where the coughing sheep,
With wool torn by the brambles, climb and leap.
Here on the hill-top the old wind is uttering
His ancient, weary, unassuaged complaints,
Baying among the rocks that rise like tombs;
Shouting aloud the wild and secret dooms
Of all things living, while the evening faints
Amid the torn white flocks of cloud that fly
In panic all across the western sky.

MAGIC

Out of their shallow pools
The grouse whirr, jeering at us fools
That have not known how all things grow estranged
Except old Magic, who with gipsy fingers
Forever sews, unwearied and unchanged,
The splendid purple garments of the hills.
They sleep within the silence that she fills
With lullabies, singing beneath her breath
Of things so long before and so long after death
That he who listens fears her, yet he lingers.



T O G . D . M .

I see you stand, a sturdy little lad
In your new suit, the sunlight on your head,
Watching the camera with your earnest eyes;
For thence would come (the photographer had said)
For good boys, sweets. But soon your eyes grew sad,
And soon you frowned in puzzled, pained surprise.
You had been so good a boy, quite free from blame,
Yet from the obstinate camera no sweets came!

In such an hour, so bitterly deceived,
Did it comfort you that one stood by and grieved?
Someone who thought the sweets well-earned, and knew
Whoever was in fault, it was not you.



CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

Alone she came;
None kissed her gown nor spoke her name.
Indifferent all things stood –
The wood, and the thick purple shadow of the wood;
The long green hill;
The tall green tree that sang when winds were still.

Unseen she went;
Nor had the trees presentiment –
The hornbeam, with its weight
Of years, and the young willow all disconsolate –
That they must be
Her mendicants for immortality.

MY LOVE IS IN THE MOUNTAINS

My Love is in the mountains dark and high,
Where winds lie dead beneath an icy sky;
Where only the cold stars are intimate;
And tears are frozen in falling and voices die.

How shall I ever climb where my Love is,
Out of life's small and bright miscellanies,
To the unsullied mountains desolate –
From silences to deeper silences?

From the red tilth and the warm woods I go
Upward, and leave the meadows dear and low;
Seeing afar, when the cold hours grow late,
My Love amid the hills of silver snow.

HILL PASTURES

High on the hill the curlews and the whimbrels,
Go mating all day long with a sweet whistle;
With a sound of chiming bells and shaken timbrels,
And silver rings that fall in a crystal cup.
They laugh, as lovers laugh when the moon is up,
Over the cotton-grass and the carline thistle.

Poised in his airy spiral the snipe is calling,
Summoning love with a music mournful and lonely
As a lost lamb in the night, rising, falling,
Stranger than any melody, wilder than song.
He cries of life that is short, and death that is long,
Telling his dusky love to one heart only.

Once in seven days a plaintive ringing
Sounds from the little chapel high in the heather,
Out with the sorrowful snipe and the whimbrel winging.
The wild hill ponies hear it there as they graze,
And whinny, and call to their foals, and stand at gaze,
Hearing a clear voice in the clear weather.

And out of pine-dark farms and windy places,
And quiet cottages low in the valley hiding,
Brown folk come with still and wistful faces.
Straying by twos and threes, like the peaceful sheep,
Into the small brown shippen of souls they creep,
Seeking a calm like the hills', but more abiding.

ON THE WILD HILL

Would God I were there, on the wild hill
Where the ponies with wet fetlocks wade in morasses
Starred with yellow mimulus, drinking the chill
Brown water! Where the bright foals, black and bay,
Run to their dams through the dark blue day,
As the shadow of a hawk passes.

If I might be there in the grave dawn,
Stumbling on a curlew's nest beneath its spread
Of flowering heather, and seeing across the lawn,
Sheep-mown, the creamy, pencilled curlew chickens run,
Quick and bright as water in the sun,
Hiding in a fresh green bracken-bed!

If only I might watch the old curlews drifting
Down the silver summer air like tawny leaves!
Hear their icy, elfin voices uplifting
The warm rich veils of silence and content,
Discovering some chill presentiment,
Like a fugitive soul that grieves.



THE LOST ORCHARD

Never in those lonely meadows lingering,
Shall I see the twilight any more;
Never hear the golden water fingering
Pale tansy shadows from the shore;

Never, when the dark thorn hedge is quickening,
Watch the white narcissi upward steal:
Nor, in the pink orchard's hazy thickening,
Hear the early bird-song thrill and peal.

Yet within my heart, where none can ever see,
Blows the apple tree and flows the stream:
Through the violet fields I move, as shadowy
As a fish within the water's gleam.



THE GRAPE-BLUE HILLS

The grape-blue hills are ripe; a thrill
Has stirred the aspen's carillon.
You foolish, chattering birds, be still!
My lover's gone!

Thunder is on the fields, and fear;
No thrushes sing and no bees hum:
But my heart's belfry rocks (oh, hear!)
My lover's come! My lover's come!



VERY EARLY

Very early we will go into the fields to-morrow
And wait beneath the budding elm-tree arches,
Till Earth has comforted her night-long sorrow
And dawn comes golden in the larches.

There's a little hush that falls when the airs lie sleeping;
The sky is like an empty silver bowl,
Till eagerly the blackbird's song goes upward sweeping,
And fills the aery hollows, and the soul.

There's a scent that only comes in the faint, fresh gloaming,
Before the crocus opens for the bees;
So early we will go and meet the young day roaming,
And see the heavens caught among the trees.

AN ESTRAY

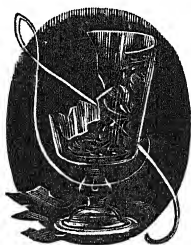
How did I come so low,
Wandering here
Under clouds of wrath and woe,
With a heart full of fear?

How did I chance to roam
Into the night,
Away from my delicate home
Of colour and light?

Out of a land serene,
Airy and lone,
I am come to the sadness terrene,
To a people of stone.

THE GOBLET

This heap of shivered green and gold
That was a goblet, never wine can hold
Again, for that one note so sweet and strong
Which only could dissolve it, came along
The silence, and the delicate, brittle thing
Besieged by beauty, made to ring and ring,
Shuddered, and fell inwards, melted as it sounded,
As the heavens might break if the Voice of God resounded.
Ah! such a note your heart has sung to mine –
See how it breaks and spills its pride like wine.



THE FLOCKMASTER

I come
Out of the heart of night, where calm distils
Like dew in the helleborine.
Forever the sheep have known me, straitened and dumb
In their life like a dark ravine;
They clamour of me to the empty sky and the hills;
They cry with a great homesickness under the moon
For something they know and know not, within them, beyond —
That they feel when I dwell on the slope in the heat of noon;
That they taste in the cold dew-pond.
Only a little less of me have they known
Than the poet knows, and far as he they have wandered
With their lambs, on the clear skyline like shadows stealing,
Clad in the fleece of their crying,
Following me on whom all creatures have pondered —
Inarticulate, sighing
After the half-revealed, the unrevealing,
The shepherd who dwelleth alone.

THE POPLAR TREE

Underneath the tuneful tree
Little flowers with golden eyes
Lift their heads in sweet surprise,
Listening continually.
Every shaken leaf is swinging
Halfway round upon its stalk
With a neighbour leaf to talk
In the pauses of the singing.
Standing in the daisy snow
Mutely, we may learn to know
What the leaves and bending grasses
Whisper so mysteriously.

*In the ancient wind that passes
One goes by invisibly.
Mistily within the tree
Dwelleth the Divinity.*

P R A I S E

I'll praise Him with the clover flower
That folds her hands and saith no word;
I'll praise Him with the dusky bird
That flits within the shadowy bower;

I'll praise Him with my soul, which thrills
Like trembling wires, and knows Him near
In all the sky, so blue and clear,
And in the shaken, pansied hills.



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